DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 186 718 CE 025 307

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TITLE Human Relations Critical Incidents for Office Simulation. Series 1, Spring 1978. Vocational Office Block Project, Michigan State University.
INSTITUTION Michigan State Univ., East Lansing. Dept. of Secondary Education and Curriculum.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 41p.
AVAILABLE FROM Department of Secondary Education and Curriculum, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48197

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Critical Incidents Method: Employer Employee Relationship; *Human Relations; Office Occupations; *Office Occupations Education; *Office Practice; Peer Relationship; Problem Solving; Secondary Education; *Simulation; Teaching Guides

ABSTRACT

Designed for office occupations teachers, this guide presents seven critical incidents that provide students with practice in human relations. The critical incidents focus on the following topics: office rumors, excessive borrowing, remembering names, adapting to change, carrying your load of work, personal calls on office phones, and coffee break abuses. For each critical incident, the following information is provided: general objectives, performance objective, number of persons to be included, time needed, materials, setting, implementation strategies, and suggestions for conducting a staff conference. (LRA)

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VOCATIONAL OFFICE BLOCK PROJECT
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Series 1

Spring 1978

HUMAN RELATIONS CRITICAL INCIDENTS FOR OFFICE SIMULATION

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

TO THE TEACHER

We all are aware that a great number of office workers who possess the required skills to do a job well do not experience job success because of their inability to work harmoniously with others--their superiors, colleagues, and the public.

In response to this problem, office education teachers must prepare future office employees not only with typewriting, transcription, and office equipment skills but also human relations skills to effectively interact with people on all levels.

Like typewriting and shorthand, human relations is a skill in which practice must take place to improve the skill. The materials that follow provide skill practice in human relations through the critical incident technique. For the purpose of this volume, a critical incident is a conflict between two or more individuals in an office-like situation that requires effective and appropriate behavior (critical behavior) on the part of the one or more individuals to prevent or resolve the conflict.

As a teaching technique for office simulation, the conflict situation should be role played and discussion of the behavior of the role players should take place. The play situation provides experimentation without possible detrimental consequences entailed in real life, and the discussion stimulates exploration of the conflict situation in terms of principles of human relations as guidelines. "Good" answers to preventing and resolving problems rather than "right" answers are emphasized.

Specifically, the critical incident technique requires that:

1) the observer (the teacher in most cases) describe what actually took place, that is the process, behavior, reactions, and responses of the person(s) in the situation, without interpreting the behavior, and

2) the group evaluate the critical behavior as reported by the observer as "effective," "ineffective," "positive," or "negative," in preventing or remedying the problem. (Ex: Was the critical behavior of the lender effective in discouraging the habitual borrower?)

The incidents have been designed to give the observer sufficient elements of a situation to facilitate the reporting of what actually occurred. Through observation reports and group discussion, the student should learn firsthand the dynamics of human relations in the office setting.

It would be an overly ambitious task for the office education teacher to expose future office workers to all the various and numerous human relations experiences encountered in actual office situations. Therefore, selection has been made of those office behaviors that are common to most offices so that particularly important aspects of office life can be brought to the foreground, highlighted, and clarified during staff conferences at the end of the class period.

The implementation of each incident is designed so that it can be programmed into simulation packet activities and the model office in operation. In addition, they may be used as worthwhile fillers for those extra minutes at the end of class or as human relations unit materials.

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and methodological approach to human
relations training in office simulation

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DEVELOPING HUMAN RELATIONS SKILLS WITH COLLEAGUES

"I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE"

or

Office Rumors

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To help the student evaluate and cope with the office grapevine.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to illustrate, through discussion, the distortions that occur in communicating information as it is transmitted from the original source through several individuals to a final destination.

NUMBER OF PERSONS

Six participants (one aware of the intent of the activity and five unaware of the intent).
Teacher-observer

TIME NEEDED

Twenty minutes to transmit rumor from original source through five other participants.
Five to seven minutes for discussion during staff conferences.

MATERIALS

Message (attached).
Transparency showing the original message (chalkboard instead of transparency may be used).
Observation Form (attached).

SETTING

*Model Office in operation.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Teacher-Observer

1. Select six student participants one of which should be the Model Office receptionist who will be the original source.

2. Oversee the total communication process assuring that the rumor is transmitted from the original source through the five other participants.

3. After the process is completed, lead a short discussion with entire class explaining the procedures followed in transmitting the rumor message.

4. Use transparency of rumor message and Observation Form for discussion springboard.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. The receptionist, Student #1, (original source) reads the message to Student #2; but, without being heard or seen by others.

2. The teacher asks Student #2 to repeat what she heard to Student #3. Message must be orally transmitted from student to student and not be written down.

3. The teacher asks Student #3 to tell Student #4 what she heard. It is important to keep in mind that each student is to transmit the message in her own way, without help from the teacher or the receptionist.

4. Student #4 tells Student #5 what she heard.

5. Student #5 tells Student #6 what she heard.

6. Students #4 and #6, after hearing the message, are instructed by the teacher to write what she heard on the chalkboard so the entire class can read it during staff conference.

*All incidents in this volume can take place during simulation packet activities also.

STAFF CONFERENCE

1. The teacher (observer) relates to the entire class the manner in which the message was transmitted.

2. The teacher leads a short discussion with the entire class using the transparency (or chalkboard) with the original message and the Observation Form.

3. The teacher asks Students #2 through #6 to relate what they heard to ascertain where the breakdown occurred in the chain message.

Discussion Points

1. Studies indicate that by the time word reaches the fourth person, a message is likely to contain distortions of the whole story.

2. Be cautious in listening to rumors which are often exaggerated or inaccurate.

3. Rumors are an unavoidable part of communication relationships among workers. However, unreliable though they may be, rumors can offer an opportunity to break out of the restrictions of official work relationships. Work situations where people cannot talk to each other, for example, because of high noise levels or separated work stations are known for a higher rate of absenteeism and job turnover.

MESSAGE:

To be read by the receptionist to Student #2 without being heard or seen.

"I couldn't wait to tell you about this accident I saw this morning.

"This semi truck, heading south, was turning right at the intersection of Main and State when Mrs. Manning's sports car, heading north, attempted to turn left. Mrs. Manning is in data processing, you know.

"When they saw that they were turning into the same lane, they both honked their horns but proceeded to turn without slowing down.

"In fact, it was Mrs. Manning's sports car that seemed to be accelerating just before the crash, not the truck as most witnesses thought."

"Thank goodness no one was injured!"

Grapevine
Transparency or
on Chalkboard

Original Message

"The semi truck, heading south, was turning right at the intersection of Main and State when Mrs. Manning's sports car, heading north, attempted to turn left. Mrs. Manning is in data processing, you know.

"When they saw that they were turning into the same lane, they both honked their horns but proceeded to turn without slowing down.

"In fact, it was Mrs. Manning's sports car that seemed to be accelerating just before the crash, not the truck as most witnesses thought."

"Thank goodness no one was injured!"

OBSERVATION FORM

Participant	Additions	Deletions	Distortions
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

"MAY I USE YOUR. . . ?"

or

Excessive Borrowing

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To give students pointers on how to handle employee borrowing when it adversely affects work efficiency.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to discourage constant borrowing by a co-worker.

NUMBER OF PERSONS

Two students--Student A, the lender; Student B, the borrower (Only Student B should be aware of intent of the activity). Teacher-observer

TIME NEEDED

At least six brief occasions for Student B to borrow an item from student A throughout the class session. Two to three minutes for discussion during staff conference.

MATERIALS

Ten office items that Student A has in her possession (pen, pencil, typing paper, carbon paper, erasing device, book, etc.)

SETTING

Model Office in Operation.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Teacher-Observer

1. Designate Student A and Student B and only inform Student B of the actions she should take.

2. Insure that at least six occasions for borrowing take place during the class session.

3. Lead a short discussion on effective ways of discouraging constant borrowing by fellow workers.

   a) Indicate to entire class what was observed--the behavior of the borrower and the lender.

   b) Indicate at what point the lender becomes irritated, if at all.

IMPLEMENTATION

Have Student B borrow office items from Student A at least six times during the class session. For example:

First Time: A sheet of typing paper (no return of item)
Second Time: An eraser (return item)
Third Time: An eraser (return item)
Fourth Time: A pencil (no return of item)
Fifth Time: A pen (no return of item)
Sixth Time: An eraser (return item)
Above may be repeated

STAFF CONFERENCE

The teacher (observer) relates to the entire class what took place between the borrower and the lender and what actions, if any, the lender took.

The class should evaluate the actions of the lender as EFFECTIVE or INEFFECTIVE in preventing or resolving the situation and why.

The teacher leads a short discussion on handling habitual borrowers.

Discussion Pointer

After the third time, the habitual borrower should have been tactfully told where and how to get supplies of her own.

"WHAT'S IN A NAME?"

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To stress the importance of being people-oriented in the office.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to associate names with faces and their departments in the Model Office or in the company in the office simulation packet.

NUMBER OF PERSONS

Entire class.

TIME NEEDED

A few minutes during the operation of the Model Office to write the names of each employee and supervisor and their department and position. (Unaware of intent of the activity).

5 to 7 minutes for discussion during staff conference.

MATERIALS

Personnel Sheet (attached) 1 for each student.
Model Office Position Assignment Sheet for teacher.

SETTING

Model Office in Operation.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Teacher-Observer

1. Oversee the activity.

2. Lead a short discussion on the importance of being people-oriented (knowing names) in the office.

IMPLEMENTATION

Teacher

1. Instruct each student to make a master list that includes the name of every employee and supervisor and their department and position to be distributed to all employees for convenience in sending birthday and holiday cards. (form attached)

2. Collect the master list sheets from each employee.

3. Check the names, departments, and positions on each list against your Model Office Position Assignment Sheet.

4. Return the lists to students.

STAFF CONFERENCE

The teacher leads a short discussion on being people-oriented in the office.

Discussion Pointers

1. When new employees go out of their way to know what name goes with what person, they get attention.

2. Too often young people have gotten away with "Hi" and do not pay much attention to names.

3. For each person to approach maximum efficiency and better serve the organization's clientele, it is important to understand the interrelationship of all persons within the business.

4. It is just as important that you know who does what and where. Instead of the stock answer "I don't know" know where to find the answer.

5. Those who succeed get to know people; they know what is going on and who is doing it.

NAME OF THE MODEL COMPANY

Personnel

Name	Department	Position
(Example) Joe Doe	Sales	Clerk-Typist

"WHEN IN ROME"

or

Adapting to Change

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To emphasize the desirability of being flexible to adjusting to various ways of typing correspondence in an office that might be different from the ways taught in school.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to easily adapt to a different way of typing a business letter than the one to which she is accustomed by honoring a request that a letter be retyped in The Modern Simplified Form.

NUMBER OF PERSONS

Three students--(Student A, Student B, and Student C)
(All three unaware of intent of activity)
Teacher-observer

TIME NEEDED

Time needed for student to type and re-type a short letter.

2 minutes for discussion on adapting to change.

SETTING

Model Office in Operation.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Teacher-Observer

1. Designate the three student participants--Student A, Student B, and Student C.

2. Oversee the activity observing reactions of participants.

3. Lead short discussion on adapting to change.

IMPLEMENTATION

Teacher

1. Request that each student participant type a handwritten letter to be presented to her for signature.

   (The teacher gives each student a short business letter with a subject line written in her own handwriting and permits the student to type it in a letter style used in class.)

2. Returns the letter to each student requesting that the letter be re-typed in The Modern Simplified Letter style, a copy of which student receives. (attached)

   The letter is to be re-submitted for signature.

3. Observes the behavior of each student in adapting to change in letter style (letter style learned in school vs. letter style used in this office).

STAFF CONFERENCE

Teacher

1. Explains to entire class what took place and the reactions of each participant. (Participants should be referred to as Student A, Student B, and Student C to assure that behavior is discussed rather than the particular student.)

2. Leads a short discussion on adapting to change.

Discussion Pointers

1. Offices vary in ways of preparing correspondence.

2. As a new employee, it would be wise to check the office manual for the preferred way of typing correspondence or look through the files to get ideas of the company's way of handling its paper work.

3. It is expedient to "do in Rome as the Roman's do," even though you have been taught another way.

5 February 1977

Mr. Word Processing Manager
International Word Processing Assoc.
Maryland Road
Willow Grove, PA 19090

THE MODERN SIMPLIFIED LETTER*

Here is a letter style, Mr. WP Manager, that deserves your recognition--the Modern Simplified Letter.

You are a competent business executive and an authority on word processing. As you see the cost of the average business letter mounting, you can appreciate the many advantages of a modern letter style that not only saves time but results in increased production.

The Modern Simplified Letter is attractive, easy to type, and functional. Notice these points among the many:

1 Military style date--easier and quicker to type
2 Address--omits unnecessary commas and periods
3 Subject--pinpoints the thinking of the writer to the recipient and eases filing
4 Ommission of unnecessary punctuation--saves secretarial time and equipment
5 Name of addressee in beginning and closing of body--adds an informal touch
6 Name of writer--prevents misspelling
7 Omission of salutation and complimentary closing--saves time
8 Standard length line and all lines blocked to left--saves time
9 Inside address is placed for a window envelope--saves time and eliminates the chance of error in addressing a plain envelope

I am sure, Mr. WP Manager, that you will have success with Modern Simplified Letters. Your associates will be impressed with your friendly messages presented with this modern format.

Cleo P. Casady
Professor

mc

*Based on the Administrative Management Society's Simplified Letter, with modifications.

"JUDGING A FAIR DAY'S WORK"

or

She's Not Carrying Her Load

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To help the student understand different ways of carrying work loads.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to illustrate different productive work styles.

NUMBER OF PERSONS

Two students in similar office positions with work areas in close proximity to each other for mutual observation--example: two students with the title "Secretary" with desks side by side in order to see each other work. (Neither student should be aware of the intent of the activity.)

MATERIALS

None other than the Model Office materials.

SETTING

Model Office in Operation.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Teacher's

1. Oversee the activity.

2. Designate Student A, the doer, and Student B, the thinker.

3. Explain to Student B, the thinker, that she is only to think (not write) of various ways to improve office efficiency or her job duties.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Student A performs duties assigned to her position.

2. Student B is given the assignment to think about ways to improve office efficiency in her job duties for the duration of the class session.

STAFF CONFERENCE

Teacher

1. Relates to entire class what took place.

2. Leads a short discussion on different work styles.

3. Gets reactions of Student A, the doer, to Student B's, the thinker, productivity that class session.

   a. What did Student A accomplish?
   b. What did Student B accomplish in the opinion of Student A?
   c. Who was more productive in the opinion of Student A?

Discussion Points

1. What can Student A do if she thinks Student B has not done a fair day's work and she has?

   a. Nothing. Unless Student A has supervision over Student B, she can't be critical about how Student B does her job no matter how great the disparity between Student B's performance and hers.

b. There are always those who are overly concerned with the actions of their coworkers; they are constantly comparing "the kind of work she does" and "the amount of work he does" with the kind (better) and the amount (more) they do themselves. This is fruitless.

c. The question is did Student B do a fair day's work?

d. Certain jobs and assignments cannot be measured in terms of so many units accomplished each day. There are activities that cannot be measured in this way, such as developing new ideas and concepts; research, tasks that must be worked out mentally, jobs that require choice, judgment, planning, creativity.

e. There is no simple "here's the rule" way to tell if the people handling them are doing a fair day's work. What applies to one job will not necessarily apply to another.

f. The only ones who can and should appraise employee's performances are their supervisors. They know what they expect of individual employees; when those expectations are met, they are getting a "fair day's work" from the people who report to them.

DEVELOPING HUMAN RELATIONS SKILLS
IN A
SUPERVISORY ROLE

"TO CALL OR NOT TO CALL"

or

Personal Calls on Office Phones

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To practice using specific human relations principles in solving a day-to-day office problem.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE

The Supervisor of the Records Library of a Large School District will be able to pose a personal calls problem to her staff that considers the principles of single objective, situation centered, mutual interest, and solution free to direct the staff to assume a positive problem solving approach without defensive behavior.

NUMBER OF PERSONS

1 Supervisor - Miss Arnold
4 Secretaries - Laura, Terry, Thelma, and Maxine
Observers - remaining class members

TIME NEEDED

15 Minutes
- 5 Minutes - Preparation for Action
- 5 Minutes - Role Playing of Staff Meeting
- 5 Minutes - Discussion

MATERIALS

1. Situation Sheet for everyone (Participants and Observers).
2. Role Sheet, one for each Participant Secretary.
3. Principles Sheet for Supervisor and Observers only.
4. Observation Sheet for Observers only.

SETTING

Role Playing should take place during Office Block Staff Conference.

(The Office Block Staff Conference is an excellent time to focus on human relations aspects that arise in the office situation.)

RESPONSIBILITIES

Teacher's

1. Select Participants for the Situation.
   a. 1 Supervisor
   b. 4 Secretaries

2. Distribute Role Playing Sheets.
   a. Situation Sheet to Participants and Observers (everyone). (The teacher might read aloud the Situation instead.)
   b. Role Sheet to each of the 4 Secretaries (Each Participant should not read any role but her own.)
   c. Observation Sheet to Observers only.

3. Inform Supervisor, Secretaries, and Observers of their responsibilities as outlined below.

4. Arrange 5 chairs in a meeting-like setting but in a manner that observers can see the faces of most of the Participants.

5. Inform Participants and Observers that there will be a discussion of the role playing; that Participants have been asked to assume certain behavior and attitudes; that these assumed behavior and attitudes will be discussed and not the student Participant; that mistakes probably will be made just as the experts make them; that a perfect performance is not expected; and that what is important is the improvement if the role playing were repeated.

6. Start the action and interrupt after 5 minutes. Participants might resist, but it is not necessary that the role playing be completed to get an idea of what direction the discussion is going.

7. Lead discussion using points on Observation Sheet as a guide.

Supervisor's

1. Read Situation Sheet.

2. Read Principles Sheet--study the principles that should be employed in an effort to solve the personal calls problem.

3. Conduct the Records Library Staff Meeting on the matter of excessive personal calls employing the principles as much as possible.

Secretaries'

1. Read Situation Sheet.

2. Study Role Sheet without reading Role Sheet of others

3. Participate in staff meeting in which the personal calls problem is of major concern.

Observers'

1. Read Situation Sheet.

2. Study Principles Sheet.

3. Use Observation Sheet to evaluate the handling of the personal calls problem by the Supervisor.

IMPLEMENTATION

At the signal of the teacher, the role playing begins with the Supervisor taking the lead.

The teacher should interrupt after 5 minutes of discussion have expired even if the role playing has not been completed.

DISCUSSION

The teacher should lead an evaluation discussion using the Observation Sheet as a guide.

ROLE SHEET

Laura - 18 years old - recently hired - single

Assume the following attitude during the staff conference, but do not feel obligated to reveal it to the Supervisor unless you consider it relevant to the discussion.

YOU ENJOY YOUR PHONE CONTACTS WITH PEOPLE IN OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICT OFFICES. JOSEPHINE, SECRETARY TO ONE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, IS A CLOSE FRIEND OF YOURS. THERE IS NOT A DAY THAT GOES BY THAT YOU DO NOT CALL HER TO GAB AWHILE. AFTER ALL, WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR? JOSEPHINE SOMETIMES CALLS YOU WHILE YOU ARE AWAY FROM THE OFFICE, AND YOU ALWAYS RETURN HER CALLS.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - cut here - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

ROLE SHEET

Terry - 21 years old - 5 years in the Library - married

Assume the following attitude during the staff conference, but do not feel obligated to reveal it to the Supervisor unless you consider it relevant to the discussion.

YOU HAVE A TWO-YEAR OLD GIRL WHOM YOU LEAVE WITH YOUR AUNT WHILE YOU ARE AT WORK. YOU FREQUENTLY CALL YOUR AUNT DURING OFFICE HOURS TO CHECK ON THINGS. SHE SOMETIMES CALLS YOU. SOMETIMES, YOU TALK TO YOUR LITTLE GIRL. YOU LIKE YOUR JOB BECAUSE YOU CAN BE NEAR THE PHONE IF YOUR AUNT CALLS YOU.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - cut here - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

ROLE SHEET

Thelma - 19 years old - 2 years in the Library - single

Assume the following attitude during the staff conference, but do not feel obligated to reveal it to the Supervisor unless you consider it relevant to the discussion.

NOW YOU KNOW, ON FIRST NAME BASIS, SEVERAL PEOPLE IN VARIOUS SCHOOL DISTRICT OFFICES AND MORE AND MORE YOU ARE ENGAGING IN LENGTHY KIDDING SESSIONS BEFORE GETTING TO THE BUSINESS AT HAND. PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR THE LIBRARY IS IMPORTANT YOU THINK AND YOU TRY YOUR BEST.

ROLE SHEET

Maxine - 39 years old - 10 years in the Library - married

Assume the following attitude during the staff conference, but do not feel obligated to reveal it to the Supervisor unless you consider it relevant to the discussion.

YOU MAKE ALL OF YOUR PERSONAL CALLS FROM THE PUBLIC TELEPHONE IN THE LOUNGE. YOU BELIEVE THAT THE PHONES IN THE RECORDS LIBRARY ARE FOR THE DISTRICT BUSINESS AND THAT PEOPLE SHOULD REALIZE THIS.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - CUT HERE - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

PRINCIPLES SHEET

*Principles (rules) for stating a problem for group discussion

1. Single Objective

   State the one major problem to be solved and not several things that are wrong.

2. Situational

   Focus on the situation and not the behavior of persons involved.

3. Mutual Interest

   State the problem in a manner that will benefit both employee and employer.

4. Solution Free

   Avoid making a suggestion as to how the problem should be solved.

Example of statement of a problem that follows the above principles:

What can we do to better serve our customers?

Points to remember to bring about group problem solving.

1. Permit individuals to get their viewpoints out without appearing to be critical. After this, they will be ready to get down to constructive problem solving.
2. Listen and respect the contributions of others. The views represent needs.
3. Do not push your personal views.

If the Supervisor (Manager) follows these principles and points to remember in discussing the difficult problem, more than likely the problem will be solved with the cooperation of the employees and without defensive behavior. Don't be concerned if a principle is not followed. Experts still have to practice using them over and over.

---

*Maier, Solem, Maier, The Role-Play Technique, University Associates, Inc., 1975, pp. 104,105.

OBSERVATION SHEET

This problem can be difficult because it is not easy to state it without producing employee and supervisor defensive behavior. Pay special attention to the behavior and attitudes of all participants and evaluate their performance at the end of the role-playing period.

1. The Supervisor (Manager) stated the problem in a manner that was

   _____ Situational (focused on situation and not on abusers)
   _____ Mutual Interest (employee and employer would benefit)
   _____ Single Objective (contained only one major problem)
   _____ Solution Free (statement of problem contained no suggested or implied solution)

2. According to your observation,

   _____ the staff members understood clearly what the problem was
   _____ the staff members did not understand clearly what the problem was

3. The Supervisor (Manager) used the following approach(es) to communicate the problem

   _____ came to the point early
   _____ understanding
   _____ authoritarian
   _____ accusative
   _____ circled the problem
   _____ down played the problem
   _____ other (specify)_____

4. The staff members were

   _____ helpful
   _____ interested
   _____ silent
   _____ critical of each other and/or the Supervisor
   _____ defensive
   _____ disinterested
   _____ hostile
   _____ other (specify)_____

5. During the discussion of the problem, the Supervisor was

   _____ a good listener
   _____ argumentative
   _____ defensive
   _____ hostile
   _____ permissive
   _____ other (specify)_____

"THE THIRD CUP IS NOT ON US"

or

Coffee Break Abuses

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To practice using specific human relations principles in solving a day-to-day office problem.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE

The Manager of the Word Processing Center will be able to pose a coffee break problem to her staff that considers the principles of single objective, situation centered, mutual interest, and solution free to direct the staff to assume a positive problem solving approach without defensive behavior.

NUMBER OF PERSONS

1 Manager - Mrs. Bennett
1 Correspondence Secretary - Miss Kern
2 Administrative Secretaries - Mrs. Michaels and Miss Reardon
1 Trainee - Miss Shelden
Observers - remaining class members

TIME NEEDED

15 Minutes
- 5 Minutes - Preparation for Action
- 5 Minutes - Role Playing of Staff Meeting
- 5 Minutes - Discussion

MATERIALS

1. Situation Sheet for everyone (Participants and Observers).
2. Role Sheet, one for each Participant Staff Member.
3. Principles Sheet for Manager and Observers only.
4. Observation Sheet for Observers only.

Coffee Break

SETTING

Role Playing should take place during Office Block Staff Conference.

(The Office Block Staff Conference is an excellent time to focus on human relations aspects that arise in the office situation.)

RESPONSIBILITIES

Teacher's

1. Select Participants for the Situation.
   a) 1 Manager
   b) 1 Correspondence Secretary
   c) 2 Administrative Secretaries
   d) 1 Trainee

2. Distribute Role Playing Sheets
   a) Situation Sheet to Participants and Observers (everyone) (The teacher might read aloud the Situation instead)
   b) Role Sheet to each of the 4 staff members (Each Participant should not read any role but her own.)
   c) Observation Sheet to Observers only

3. Inform Manager, Staff Members and Observers of their responsibilities as outlined below.

4. Arrange 5 chairs in a meeting-like setting but in a manner that observers can see the faces of most of the Participants.

5. Inform Participants and Observers that there will be a discussion of the role playing; that Participants have been asked to assume certain behavior and attitudes; that these assumed behavior and attitudes will be discussed and not the Student Participants; that mistakes probably will be made just as the experts make them; that a perfect performance is not expected; and that what is important is the improvement if the role playing were repeated.

6. Start the action and interrupt after 5 minutes. Participants might resist, but it is not necessary that the role playing be completed to get an idea of what direction the discussion is going.

7. Lead discussion using points on Observation Sheet as a guide.

Manager's

1. Read Situation Sheet.

2. Read Principles Sheet--study the principles that should be employed in an effort to solve the coffee break problem.

3. Conduct the Word Processing Department Staff Meeting on the matter of coffee breaks employing the principles as much as possible.

Staff Members'

1. Read Situation Sheet.

2. Study Role Sheet without reading Role Sheet of others.

3. Participate in staff meeting in which the coffee break is of major concern.

Observers'

1. Read Situation Sheet.

2. Study Principles Sheet.

3. Use Observation Sheet to evaluate the handling of the coffee break problem by the Manager.

IMPLEMENTATION

At the signal of the teacher, the role playing begins with the Manager taking the lead.

The teacher should interrupt after 5 minutes of discussion have expired even if the role playing has not been completed.

DISCUSSION

The teacher should lead an evaluation discussion using the Observation Sheet as a guide.

Coffee Break

SITUATION SHEET

1. Mrs. Bennett is the Manager of the Word Processing Center. There are 1 Corresponding Secretary, Miss Kern; 2 Administrative Secretaries, Mrs. Michaels and Miss Reardon; and 1 Trainee, Miss Shelden.

2. A 15-minute coffee break is taken half way through the morning and another 15-minute break middle afternoon. The staff members stagger their break thus, not all of them are out of the Center at the same time.

3. Mrs. Bennett has noticed that some of the staff members are beginning to take advantage of the situation and are taking from 25 to 30 minutes for their breaks.

4. Mrs. Bennett finds it necessary to speak of this matter during the regular weekly staff conference.

ROLE SHEET

Correspondence Secretary - Miss Kern

Assume the following attitude during the staff conference but do not fee obligated to reveal it to the Manager unless you consider it relevant to the discussion.

YOU LIKE TO GO TO THE RESTAURANT DOWN THE STREET DURING YOUR 15-MINUTE COFFEE BREAKS. THE FRESH AIR DOES YOU GOOD. THE RESTAURANT HAS BECOME A POPULAR ONE RECENTLY AND THE CARRY-OUT LINE IS LONG OFTEN TAKING THE ENTIRE 15 MINUTES TO GET THE COFFEE. YOU FEEL IT'S GOOD COFFEE AND WORTH THE WAIT. OF COURSE YOU HAVE TO DRINK YOUR COFFEE SO YOU DRINK IT AT YOUR DESK WHICH USUALLY TAKES 5 MINUTES. NO ONE HAS SAID ANYTHING ABOUT IT. YOU TAKE IT THAT SILENCE MEANS CONSENT.

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ROLE SHEET

Administrative Secretary - Mrs. Michaels

Assume the following attitude during the staff conference but do not feel obligated to reveal it to the Manager unless you consider it relevant to the discussion.

YOU SELDOM GO OUT FOR COFFEE DURING THE RELIEF PERIODS TO WHICH YOU ARE ENTITLED. THE FEW TIMES YOU DO TAKE A COFFEE BREAK, YOU STAY WITHIN THE 15-MINUTE PERIOD. ISN'T THAT WHAT ALL EMPLOYEES SHOULD DO?

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ROLE SHEET

Administrative Secretary - Miss Reardon

Assume the following attitude during the staff conference but do not feel obligated to reveal it to the Manager unless you consider it relevant to the discussion.

YOU TAKE BOTH OF THE COFFEE BREAK PERIODS. YOU USUALLY STAY AWAY FOR 25-MINUTES OR SO. YOU REALIZE THAT IT USED TO BE 15-MINUTES BUT THAT EXTRA CUP OF COFFEE IS BECOMING A HABIT WITH YOU. IT SEEMS TO BE ALL RIGHT, FOR NO ONE HAS SAID ANYTHING ABOUT IT.

ROLE SHEET

Trainee - Miss Shelden

Assume the following attitude during the staff conference but do not feel obligated to reveal it to the Manager unless you consider it relevant to the discussion.

YOU ARE THE NEW TRAINEE IN THE CENTER. YOU NOTICE THAT MOST OF THE OTHER STAFF MEMBERS TAKE LONGER COFFEE BREAKS THAN THE OFFICE MANUAL INDICATES THEY SHOULD BE. THEREFORE, YOU DO NOT FEEL TERRIBLY GUILTY FOR TAKING 20-TO 25-MINUTE BREAKS. AFTER ALL, THE MANAGER IS NOT VERY STRICT.

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Coffee Break

PRINCIPLES SHEET

*Principles (rules) for stating a problem for group discussion.

1. Single Objective

   State the one major problem to be solved and not several things that are wrong.

2. Situational

   Focus on the situation and not the behavior of persons involved.

3. Mutual Interest

   State the problem in a manner that will benefit both employee and employer.

4. Solution Free

   Avoid making a suggestion as to how the problem should be solved.

Example of statement of a problem that follows the above principles:

What can we do to better serve our customers?

Points to remember to bring about group problem solving.

1. Permit individuals to get their viewpoints out without appearing to be critical. After this, they will be ready to get down to constructive problem solving.
2. Listen and respect the contributions of others. The views represent needs.
3. Do not push your personal views.

If the Supervisor (Manager) follows these principles and points to remember in discussing the difficult problem, more than likely the problem will be solved with the cooperation of the employees and without defensive behavior. Don't be concerned if a principle is not followed. Experts still have to practice using them over and over.

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*Maier, Solem, Maier, The Role-Play Technique, University Associates, Inc., 1975, pp. 104-105.

OBSERVATION SHEET

This problem can be difficult because it is not easy to state it without producing employee and supervisor defensive behavior. Pay special attention to the behavior and attitudes of all participants and evaluate their performance at the end of the role-playing period.

1. The Supervisor (Manager) stated the problem in a manner that was

   _____ Situational (focused on situation and not on abusers)
   _____ Mutual interest (employee and employer would benefit)
   _____ Single Objective (contained only one major problem)
   _____ Solution Free (statement of problem contained no suggested or implied solution)

2. According to your observation,

   _____ the staff members understood clearly what the problem was
   _____ the staff members did not understand clearly what the problem was

3. The Supervisor (Manager) used the following approach(es) to communicate the problem

   _____ came to the point early
   _____ understanding
   _____ authoritarian
   _____ accusative
   _____ circled the problem
   _____ down played the problem
   _____ other (specify)_____

4. The staff members were

   _____ helpful
   _____ interested
   _____ silent
   _____ critical of each other and/or the Supervisor
   _____ defensive
   _____ disinterested
   _____ hostile
   _____ other (specify)_____

5. During the discussion of the problem, the Supervisor was

   _____ a good listener
   _____ argumentative
   _____ defensive
   _____ hostile
   _____ permissive
   _____ other (specify)_____